

experts

## The brave little tailor

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

One summer morning a little tailor was sitting on his table near the window. In good spirits, he was sewing with all his might. A peasant woman came down the street crying, "Good jam for sale! Good jam for sale!"

That sounded good to the little tailor, so he stuck his dainty head out the window and shouted, "Come up here, my dear woman! You can sell your goods here!" The woman carried her heavy basket up the three flights of stairs to the tailor, who had her unpack all of her jars. He examined them, picking each one up and holding it to his nose. Finally he said, "This jam looks good to me. Weigh out four ounces for me, even if it comes to a quarter pound."

The woman, who had hoped to make a good sale, gave him what he asked for, then went away angry and grumbling.

"May God bless this jam to give me health and strength," said the little tailor. Then taking a loaf of bread from his cupboard, he cut himself a large slice and spread it with the jam. "That is not going to taste bad," he said, "but I will finish the jacket before I bite into it."

He laid the bread aside and continued his sewing, happily making his stitches larger and larger. Meanwhile the smell of the sweet jam rose to the wall where a large number of flies were sitting. Attracted by the smell, a swarm of them settled onto the bread.

"Hey! Who invited you?" said the little tailor, driving away the unbidden guests. However, the flies, who did not understand German, would not be turned away, and they came back in ever-increasing numbers. Finally, losing his temper, he reached for a piece of cloth and shouted, "Wait, now I'm going to give it to you!" then hit at them without mercy. When he backed off and counted, there were no fewer than seven of them lying dead before him, with their legs stretched out.

"Aren't you someone?" he said to himself, surprised at his own bravery. The whole town shall hear about this." He hastily cut out a banner for himself, then embroidered on it with large letters, *Seven with one blow*. "The town?" he said further. "The whole world shall hear about this!" And his heart jumped for joy like a lamb's tail.

The tailor tied the banner around his body and set forth into the world, for he thought that his workshop was too small for such bravery. Before leaving he looked about his house for something that he could take with him. Finding nothing but a piece of old cheese, he put that into his pocket. Outside the town gate he found a bird that was caught in a bush. It went into his pocket with the cheese.

He bravely took to the road, and being light and agile he did not grow weary. The road led him up a mountain, and when he reached the top a huge giant was sitting there, looking around contentedly.

The little tailor went up to him cheerfully and said, "Good day, comrade. Are you just sitting here looking at the wide world? I am on my way out there to prove myself. Do you want to come with me?"

The giant looked at the tailor with contempt, saying, "You wretch! You miserable fellow!"

"You don't say!" answered the little tailor. Unbuttoning his coat, he showed the banner to the giant. "You can read what kind of man I am."

The giant read *Seven with one blow*, and thinking that the tailor had killed seven men, he gained some respect for the little fellow. But he did want to put him to the test, so he picked up a stone and squeezed it with his hand until water dripped from it.

"Do what I just did," said the giant, "if you have the strength."

"Is that all?" said the little tailor. "That is child's play for someone like me."

Reaching into his pocket he pulled out the soft cheese and squeezed it until liquid ran from it. "That was even better, wasn't it?" he said.

The giant did not know what to say, for he did not believe the little man. Then the giant picked up a stone and threw it so high that it could scarcely be seen. "Now, you little dwarf, do that."

"A good throw," said the tailor, "but the stone did fall back to earth. I'll throw one for you that will not come back." He reached into his pocket, pulled out the bird, and threw it into the air. Happy to be free, the bird flew up and away, and did not come back. "How did you like that, comrade?" asked the tailor.

"You can throw well enough," said the giant, but now let's see if you are able to carry anything proper." He led the little tailor to a mighty oak tree that had been cut down and was lying on the ground. He said, "If you are strong enough, then help me carry this tree out of the woods."

"Gladly," answered the little man. "You take the trunk on your shoulder, and I will carry the branches and twigs. After all, they are the heaviest."

The giant lifted the trunk onto his shoulder, but the tailor sat down on a branch, and the giant, who could not see behind himself, had to drag long the entire tree, with the little tailor sitting on top. Cheerful and in good spirits, he whistled the song "There Were Three Tailors Who Rode Out to the Gate," as though carrying a tree were child's play.

The giant, after dragging the heavy load a little way, could not go any further, and he called out, "Listen, I have to drop the tree."

The tailor jumped down agilely, took hold of the tree with both arms, as though he had been carrying it, and said to the giant, "You are such a big fellow, and you can't even carry a tree."

They walked on together until they came to a cherry tree. The giant took hold of the treetop where the ripest fruit was hanging, bent it down, and put it into the tailor's hand, inviting him to eat. However, the little tailor was much too weak to hold the tree, and when the giant let go, the tree sprang upward, throwing the tailor into the air. When he fell back to earth, without injury, the giant said, "What? You don't have enough strength to hold that little switch?"

"There is no lack of strength," answered the little tailor. "Do you think that that would be a problem for someone who killed seven with one blow? I jumped over the tree because hunters are shooting down there in the brush. Jump over it yourself, if you can."

The giant made the attempt, but could not clear the tree and got stuck in the branches. So the little tailor kept the upper hand here as well.

The giant said, "If you are such a brave fellow, then come with me to our cave and spend the night with us."

The little tailor agreed and followed him. When they reached the cave, other giants were sitting there by a fire. Each one had a roasted sheep in his hand and was eating from it. The little tailor looked around and thought, "It is a lot more roomy here than in my workshop."

The giant showed him a bed and told him to lie down and go to sleep. However, the little tailor found the bed too large, so instead of lying there he crept into a corner. At midnight the giant thought that the little tailor was fast asleep, so he got up, took a large iron bar, and with a single blow smashed the bed in two. He thought he had put an end to the grasshopper.

Early the next morning the giants went into the woods, having completely forgotten the little tailor, when he suddenly approached them cheerfully and boldly. Fearing that he would strike them all dead, the terrified giants ran away in haste.

The little tailor continued on his way, always following his pointed nose. After wandering a long time, he came to the courtyard of a royal palace, and being tired, he lay down in the grass and fell asleep. While he was lying there people came and looked at him from all sides, and they read his banner, *Seven with one blow*.

"Oh," they said, "what is this great war hero doing here in the midst of peace? He must be a powerful lord."

They went and reported him to the king, thinking that if war were to break out, he would be an important and useful man who at any price should not be allowed to go elsewhere. The king was pleased with this advice, and he sent one of his courtiers to the little tailor to offer him a position in the army, as soon as he woke up.

The messenger stood by the sleeper and waited until he stretched his arms and legs and opened his eyes, and then he delivered his offer.

"That is precisely why I came here," answered the little tailor. "I am ready to enter the king's service." Thus he was received with honor and given a special place to live.

However, the soldiers were opposed to the little tailor, and wished that he were a thousand miles away. "What will happen," they said among themselves, "if we quarrel with him, and he strikes out against us? Seven of us will fall with each blow. People like us can't stand up to that."

So they came to a decision, and all together they went to the king and asked to be released. "We were not made," they said, "to stand up to a man who kills seven with one blow."

The king was sad that he was going to lose all his faithful servants because of one man, and he wished that he had never seen him. He would like to be rid of him, but he did not dare dismiss him, because he was afraid that he would kill him and all his people and then set himself on the royal throne.

He thought long and hard, and finally found an answer. He sent a message to the little tailor, informing him that because he was such a great war hero he would make him an offer. In a forest in his country there lived two giants who were causing great damage with robbery, murder, pillage, and arson. No one could approach them without placing himself in mortal danger. If he could conquer and kill these two giants, the king would give him his only daughter to wife and half his kingdom for a dowry. Furthermore, a hundred horsemen would go with him for support.

"That is something for a man like you," thought the little tailor. "It is not every day that someone is offered a beautiful princess and half a kingdom."

"Yes," he replied. "I shall conquer the giants, but I do not need the hundred horsemen. Anyone who can strike down seven with one blow has no cause to be afraid of two."

The little tailor set forth, and the hundred horsemen followed him. At the edge of the forest, he said to them, "You stay here. I shall take care of the giants myself." Leaping into the woods, he looked to the left and to the right. He soon saw the two giants. They were lying asleep under a tree, snoring until the branches bent up and down. The little tailor, not lazy, filled both pockets with stones and climbed the tree. Once in the middle of the tree, he slid out on a branch until he was seated right above the sleepers. Then he dropped one stone after another onto one of the giant's chest. For a long time the giant did not feel anything, but finally he woke up, shoved his companion, and said, "Why are you hitting me?"

"You are dreaming," said the other one. "I am not hitting you."

They fell asleep again, and the tailor threw a stone at the second one.

"What is this?" said the other one. "Why are you throwing things at me?"

"I am not throwing anything at you," answered the first one, grumbling.

They quarreled for a while, but because they were tired, they made peace, and they both closed their eyes again. Then the little tailor began his game again.

Choosing his largest stone, he threw it at the first giant with all his strength, hitting him in the chest.

"That is too mean!" shouted the giant, then jumped up like a madman and pushed his companion against the tree, until it shook. The other one paid him back in kind, and they became so angry that they pulled up trees and struck at each other until finally, at the same time, they both fell to the ground dead.

Then the little tailor jumped down. "It is fortunate," he said, "that they did not pull up the tree where I was sitting, or I would have had to jump into another one like a squirrel. But people like me are nimble."

Drawing his sword, he gave each one a few good blows to the chest, then went back to the horsemen and said, "The work is done. I finished off both of them, but it was hard. In their need they pulled up trees to defend themselves. But it didn't help them, not against someone like me who kills seven with one blow."

"Are you not wounded?" asked the horsemen.

"Everything is all right," answered the tailor. "They did not so much as bend one of my hairs."

Not wanting to believe him, the horsemen rode into the woods. There they found the giants swimming in their own blood, and all around lay the uprooted trees. The little tailor asked the king for the promised reward, but the latter regretted the promise, and once again he began to think of a way to get the hero off his neck. "Before you receive my daughter and half the kingdom," he said, "you must fulfill another heroic deed. In the woods there is a unicorn that is causing much damage. First you must capture it.

"I am even less afraid of a unicorn than I was of two giants. Seven with one blow, that is my thing."

Taking a rope and an ax, he went into the woods. Once again he told those who went with him to wait behind. He did not have to look very long. The unicorn soon appeared, leaping toward the tailor as if it wanted to spear him at once.

"Gently, gently," said the tailor. "Not so fast." He stopped, waited until the animal was very near, then jumped agilely behind a tree. The unicorn ran with all its might into the tree, sticking its horn so tightly into the trunk that it did not have enough strength to pull it out again, and thus it was captured.

"Now I have the little bird," said the tailor, coming out from behind the tree. First he tied the rope around the unicorn's neck, then he cut the horn out of the tree with the ax. When everything was ready, he led the animal away and brought it to the king.

The king still did not want to give him the promised reward and presented a third requirement. Before the wedding, the tailor was to capture a wild boar that was causing great damage in the woods. Huntsmen were to assist him.

"Gladly," said the tailor. "That is child's play."

He did not take the huntsmen into woods with him, and they were glad about that, for they had encountered the wild boar before and had no desire to do so again.

When the boar saw the tailor he ran toward him with foaming mouth and grinding teeth, wanting to throw him to the ground. But the nimble hero ran into a nearby chapel, then with one leap jumped back out through a window. The boar ran in after him, but the tailor ran around outside and slammed the door. Thus the furious animal was captured, for it was too heavy and clumsy to jump out the window. The little tailor called to the huntsmen. They had to see the captured boar with their own eyes.

The hero reported to the king, who now -- whether he wanted to or not -- had to keep his promise and give him his daughter and half the kingdom. If he had known that it was not a war hero, but rather a little tailor standing before him, it would have been even more painful for him. The wedding was thus held with great ceremony but little joy, and a king was made from a tailor.

Some time later the young queen heard in the night how her husband said in a dream, "Boy, make the jacket for me, and patch the trousers, or I will hit you across your ears with a yardstick." Thus she determined where the young lord had come from. The next morning she brought her complaint to her father, asking him to help her get rid of the man, who was nothing more than a tailor.

The king comforted her, saying, "Tonight leave your bedroom door unlocked. My servants will stand outside, and after he falls asleep they will go inside, bind him, and carry him to a ship that will take him far away from here."

The wife was satisfied with this. However, the king's squire, who had a liking for the young lord, heard everything and revealed the whole plot to him.

"I'll put a stop to that," said the little tailor. That evening he went to bed with his wife at the usual time. When she thought he was asleep she got up, opened the door, and then went back to bed. The little tailor, who was only pretending to be asleep, began crying out with a clear voice, "Boy, make the jacket for me, and patch the trousers, or I will hit you across your ears with a yardstick! I have struck down seven with one blow, killed two giants, led away a unicorn, and captured a wild boar, and I am supposed to be afraid of those who are standing just outside the bedroom!"

When those standing outside heard the tailor say this, they were so overcome with fear that they ran away, as though the wild horde was behind them. None of them dared to approach him ever again.

Thus the little tailor was a king, and he remained a king as long as he lived.

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